United Nations E/CN.6/2007/NGO/40

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 January 2007

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-first session
26 February-9 March 2007
Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by Christian Children's Fund, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.

06-68621 (E) 190107

Statement

Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Groups

The theme of this year's CSW, "Elimination of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child," presents a timely opportunity for addressing the issues and concerns of girls who are associated with armed forces and groups ("girl soldiers"). We recognize that there is greater international awareness of children recruited and used by armed forces and groups. We commend efforts by the Office of the Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, and civil society in their human rights advocacy for child soldiers. Furthermore, we have been encouraged by the development of international standards such as the Optional Protocol on Children and Armed Conflict, the ICC, Security Resolution 1612, ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst forms of Child Labour, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Yet, we are concerned that relatively little attention has focused specifically on the needs and concerns of girl soldiers. All too often their presence is overlooked in conflict and post-conflict situations. The girl soldier is the most vulnerable in armed conflict not only because of her age but also due to the higher risk of experiencing gender discrimination, gender-based violence, and social stigmatization during and after conflict.

The girl soldier remains hidden partly due to the fact that her role as a soldier is varied and unrecognized. The roles may include any of the following experiences: armed fighting, combat trainers, mine sweepers, spying and informant, forced marriage, early motherhood, sex slavery, nursing, looters, messengers, and food gatherers/cooks. Girls are systematically recruited and used for particular purposes – slipping undetected through security points, carrying heavy loads silently, or sex slavery. Girls who fill these various roles often remain invisible to governments, UN entities, and humanitarian agencies. Governments, donors, UN agencies, and humanitarian aid organizations should presume that the girl soldier exists in all armed conflicts.

Traditional Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes have inhibited the protection and gender development needs of the girl soldier. Even when access to rehabilitation programmes is available to girls, they avoid them because of their overly public nature. They expose the girl soldier and her offspring to greater stigmatization and community ostracization. In addition, many girl soldiers still refrain from traditional DDR programmes due to age and gender insensitive environments. There have been some steps in improving DDR processes such as DPKO in establishing child protection officers in missions and Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for a greater incorporation of a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations and DDR. Progress calls for better implementation and monitoring mechanisms of girl soldiers in situations of conflict and in DDR processes. Governments, UN agencies, and humanitarian aid organizations need to ensure DDR processes and programmes address the girl soldier's gender-specific and highly-sensitive experiences of abduction, forced marriage, prostitution, early motherhood, in addition to armed fighting roles.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have outlined important protection and psychosocial guidelines for girls that are being overlooked in the post-conflict rehabilitation agenda.

> States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment, which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.
> (CRC, Article 39)

> Develop and disseminate research on the physical, psychological, economic and social effects of armed conflicts on women, particularly young women and girls, with a view to developing policies and programmes to address the consequences of conflicts.
> (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, E4.146.c)

Building upon these recommendations means reforming traditional DDR programmes to encompass the more holistic approach of Prevention, Release, and Integration (PRI). PRI programmes that are gender-specific are necessary for the prevention of continual harm by men and boys on the girl soldier and their children, as well as attention to gender-specific issues. We propose the following recommendations as necessary steps to protecting girl soldiers and ending their invisibility and lack of access to rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. DDR programmes and post-conflict humanitarian aid should be reassessed to include the following:

Prevention:

- Mandatory vulnerability analysis processes need to be implemented.
- Research needs to be built upon effective practice.
- Prevention needs to include a holistic prevention policy on all levels, from familial to societal.
- Fund and conduct comparative gender studies to document community-based programme responses and outcomes for reintegrating girl soldiers and their children as well as incorporating gender, reproductive health, market analysis, vocational and business skills, and population issues in PRI.
- Train PRI implementers and peace-builders (including protection monitoring).
- End impunity for recruiters of child soldiers.
- Provide positive life options for girls and youth such as employment, education.

Release:

- Do not assume that girl soldiers are nonexistent even if armed groups deny their participation.
- Provide a safe environment for girls to acknowledge their roles as soldiers.
- Include girls in the process of determining their own release from armed forces and groups.

Integration:

- Offer community-based reintegration programmes that are gender sensitive. Such programmes should comprise of conflict resolution, dialogue, and mediation among families and communities.

Social reintegration or restorative justice needs to be included to prevent social stigmatization. Girls and community leaders should be included in offering solutions for reintegration and restorative justice.

- Integration programs should recognize that girls are not a uniform category – some may have been commanders while other have been porters. Integration programs should recognize the skills acquired inside the armed groups and offer girls various choices or options regarding their reintegration activities and pathways.
- Build upon the resilient nature of girl soldiers by including their voices and input in rehabilitation processes.
- Conduct sensitization training of governments, peace-builders, and communities in post-conflict rehabilitation. Include in these trainings the key persons identified as religious leaders, traditional practitioners, health workers etc.
- Girl soldiers' and their children's inability to reintegrate into society is compounded by lack of access to education and to health care, by community stigmatization and familial or "husband" abandonment, which can be additionally compounded by single parenting. Integration should include the holistic needs of girl soldiers such as medical care that includes traditional healing, psychosocial care, non-threatening spiritual rituals, and child agency building. Jobs, training, literacy, and education should not be forgotten in integration. These measures can prevent further inscription into armed groups. Moving girl soldiers beyond poverty is crucial for her and her children's successful integration into society.
- Form NGO partnerships and community groups for establishing effective Integration programmes.
- Access to healthcare is critical because of girls' heightened exposure to gender-based violence. Girl soldiers are greater risk of fistulas, STIs, and HIV/AIDs. Their physical and psychological health is also of serious concern due to rape and early motherhood.
- Children born to girl soldiers in captivity and/or children born out of rape also need the same access to integration aid. Girl soldiers' children are also victims of social stigmatization.
- Not all girl soldiers have been abducted, some chose to join for a variety of reasons: to avoid poverty, to ameliorate their livelihood, to develop skills, to escape other forms of violence, or to participate in a unified entity. In order for effective reintegration programmes, they need to address the root causes for girls joining armed groups.